

Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission • Bureau of Consumer Protection • Office of Consumer and Business Education

Wash Daze: Laundry Gadgets Won't Lighten the Load

Wouldn't it be great to throw out those heavy boxes and bottles of laundry detergent and replace them with a small, light-weight, money-saving plastic ball? Some businesses claim that their reusable balls, rings and discs, filled with what they say is a special liquid, can take the place of laundry detergents.

The manufacturers claim their products "change the molecular structure of water" to force dirt out of clothing. Internet ads and product distributors maintain that their laundry aids, which cost about \$75 apiece, can last for thousands of loads — and save customers hundreds of dollars in detergent costs.

Before you toss out your tried and true detergents, consider this: Tests show that these gadgets do little more than clean out your wallet. At best, they're marginally better than washing clothes in hot water alone, and not as effective as washing them with laundry detergent. At worst, the products are completely useless.

The Real Dirt on Getting Your Laundry Clean

- **Follow the care label instructions.** Cleaning instructions are required on most textile clothing. They are not required on clothing made primarily of suede or leather, footwear, items for the head and hands — such as hats and gloves — or on household items like sheets and towels. However, many manufacturers of these items provide care information voluntarily.
- **Pre-treat stains.**
- **Sort by color.** Wash whites separately; light and medium colors together; and brights and darks by themselves.
- **Don't overload your washer.** Clothes need room to move and enough water to carry away the soil.
- **Follow product instructions.** Use the recommended amount of detergent and other laundry products, and follow the recommended procedures. Some products are added to the water before the clothes; others, like liquid fabric softener, are added at the start of the rinse cycle.



For More Information

- The American Apparel Manufacturers' Association at www.americanapparel.org.
- The Soap and Detergent Association at www.sdahq.org.
- Individual soap and detergent manufacturers — many include a toll-free number on their labels or packaging.
- The Federal Trade Commission publishes **Closet Cues: Care Labels and Your Clothes**. For a free copy or a complete listing of FTC publications, contact the Consumer Response Center by phone: 202-FTC-HELP (382-4357); TDD: (202) 326-2502; by mail: Consumer Response Center, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580; or at www.ftc.gov.